

Communication skills are foundational to success. So much so, that communications training is a booming business, with millions of books, seminars, and online courses and webinars attesting to this fact. To rise in one's career, learning to speak with confidence is vital. Millions of people seek to be trained in the arts of public speaking and negotiation. Making our point concisely has become an art form as embodied by the "elevator pitch." We seek to learn how to talk to our co-workers, our boss, our spouse, and our children.



As part of honing our communication skills, many of us have studied how to handle criticism from these same sources. Let's face it, criticism is painful, especially if there's any truth to it, especially if it's from someone we know well and care about. We seek to avoid criticism, and if unavoidable, most of us have done at least a little practice on how to handle it.

We study how to respond in the face of another's brutal assessment of our performance, skills, ideas. We learn to "stand up" for ourselves with maturity, dignity, and a calm demeanor that hopefully resist the urge to shoot back a verbal barb in retaliation. We read, we role-play, we even stand in front of the mirror and practice responding in the face of a potential verbal attack.

This is all helpful in one's personal and professional

development. But how prepared are we when the insufferable critic comes from within? How many of us have an inner voice that is less than kind, and may have gotten it's "sea legs" from a critical parent, disapproving teacher, or childhood bully? These "old

tapes" are not only unsettling to experience from within. They can be devastating to our self-esteem over time if we are unaware of them and replay them over and over.

**"Whether you think
you can, or you
think you can't—
you're right."**

—Henry Ford This self-talk tool is meant to help you to become aware of the way in which you speak to yourself, and to re-record your inner dialogue to take self-sabotage out of your future.

On the pages that follow, you'll find exercises for renovating the way you talk to yourself. You will also find tips and links to additional resources.

STEP 1: AWARENESS

The first step in renovating negative self-talk is becoming aware of when you're engaging in it. Mindfulness is a great skill to develop that will help you to tune-in. There are numerous mindfulness exercises you can engage in, and a quick online search will provide dozens of free resources.

A wonderful exercise for teaching the mind to tune in is very simple in practice but provides great dividends.

Sitting in Silence in Nature

This may seem obvious, but it really does take practice for most people. Get yourself outside for a few minutes. It's okay to start small, sitting still while unplugged doesn't come so easily to many people these days. That's right, unplug—turning off your electronic devices is recommended.

Sit in a position you can comfortably hold for at least 3 minutes. You don't have to sit on the ground, you can sit on a chair or a bench. If you are able to comfortably sit on the ground (and it is a mild, dry day), you may find it even more soothing to sit in the grass.

Focus on your breath. Feel your stomach expand as you breathe in, and feel it slowly fall as you breathe out. You don't have to count breaths right now, just sit and breathe. Try to take slow, deep breaths if you can. Now observe your surroundings. Try to be as still as possible. Just look and listen. Try to clear your mind and just notice what you see. What you hear. Thoughts may intrude. Simply acknowledge them and let them go, returning your eyes and ears to what you see and hear. Sit for as long as you are able. Do a light stretch as you get up if it feels comfortable.

The first time you do this exercise, you may feel quite restless. Sitting still for three minutes may feel like an eternity. This exercise becomes easier with practice. After a few sessions, you may very well feel the desire to sit for longer and longer periods of time, enjoying the peace within. You will very likely begin to tune into the microcosms around you. The light glinting



off of the wings of a butterfly. The rustle of leaves on a breezy fall day. The gurgle of a stream flowing gently past. The very practice of tuning in can become a welcome haven on a busy day.

This exercise can be done indoors as well. You can try it any time by pausing your activities, even for a moment, to notice your surroundings, and breathe. Although this exercise is done with your eyes open, it can be called a form of meditation.

The more you do this exercise, the more you may want to return to it for relaxation and grounding. You may find that you want to take your meditation to the next level.

More in depth meditation practices are a great tool for becoming self-aware. There is a wealth of information and variety of meditations to discover online.

If you are new to meditation or if you seek a particular result from your meditation practice, you may want to try guided meditation, in which you listen as you are led through the steps of relaxation by an experienced teacher.

There are many options for learning to be mindful. See what works best for you. The best method is the one you enjoy doing and repeat.

For those interested in taking your practice You can find our tool on tips for meditation at NationalWellness.org/nwi_tools



STEP 2: RENOVATION

Use the chart on the next page to brainstorm as many ways you can think of that you put yourself down. Fill in the **left column** of the chart with one instance per box. Don't worry if you can't come up with many. The goal of using the mindfulness exercise on the previous page is for you to become aware of when you do this in your thoughts going forward, so that you can catch yourself when it happens in the future.

As you begin to tune in over time you'll be able to not only notice these moments, but stop yourself and re-frame your self-critical thoughts into something that lovingly affirms¹. Don't give up, this is a battle of inches. Through time and practice, you'll get there!

A Kinder Voice.

Now it's time to fill in the right column of your chart. Choose an alternate statement for each of the self-critical things you've written in the left column.

If you're feeling stuck and can't see the way out of

a situation, such as a negative relationship, try turn this around by asking yourself any of these three "helper" questions:

What would I say to my loved one who spoke to themselves this way? (Especially if I were speaking to a child.)

What would I say to a friend if I heard them criticizing themselves in this way?

What would a friend say to me if they heard me criticize myself this way?

One helpful way to tap into feelings of compassion is to close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and imagine yourself holding a tiny kitten in your hands, gently protecting it. Connect with your **heart energy** as you envision wrapping love and compassion around this tiny life in your care.

After a minute, open your eyes and continue to fill in the right column.

EXAMPLES

SELF-CRITICAL THINGS I TEND TO TELL MYSELF	CONVERSATION RENOVATION
I've never been popular.	I'm a great friend to have.
I always babble like a fool when I'm nervous.	I am a great communicator.
Crying at the movies means I'm a sap.	I have a gift for empathy.

¹ Janet Fouts, *When Life Hits the Fan, A Mindful Guide to Caring for Yourself While Caring for Others* (San Jose: Tatu Digital Media, 2018), 76-77.



Self-talk RENOVATION

Record only as many triggers as your are comfortable with. The entire page has been provided should you wish to make copies for future exercises.

SELF-CRITICAL THINGS I TEND TO TELL MYSELF	CONVERSATION RENOVATION

LEVELING UP

If you've completed your renovation column, see if you can repeat this process one more time and convert your new statements into questions. Author and mindfulness expert [Dr. Steve Taubman](#) points out in his book, [Buddha in the Trenches](#), that our self talk can take on a new dimension when we transform what would otherwise be positive affirmations into questions. This works, according to Dr. Taubman, because when we ask questions, our minds immediately get to work to supply the answers. The key is to ask the *right* questions².

To demonstrate, in the previous exercise,

we have turned "I am unpopular" into I am a great friend to have." So rather than asking "Why am I unpopular?", stay with your renovated statement, but now turn this onto the question, "In what ways am I a great friend?" See below for examples of how to take your newly renovated self statements to the next level by converting them to questions.

Your subconscious mind is always on standby to help you out with answers to your questions. With a little re-calibrating, it can become a wonderful advocate.

CONVERSATION RENOVATION	CONVERSATION LEVEL-UP
I'm a great friend to have.	In what ways am I a great friend to have?
I am a great communicator.	What makes me a great communicator?
I have a gift for empathy.	How do I share my gift for empathy with others?

² Dr. Steve Taubman, *Buddha in the Trenches, The Timeless System for Developing Unshakable Performance Under Pressure* (New York: Powertrack Publications, 2017), 26.

